

Oral History Digitization Project

Oral History Through Song

Oral history of Joe Moses

Date recorded: August 12, 1942

Background: Joseph Moses, born ca. 1889, was the last Duwamish tribal member to live on the tribe's historic lands near the former Black River in Renton. The Moses family home was located where the practice fields are now just west of Renton High School. Joe was the son of Jimmie and Jennie Moses and the older brother of Henry Moses, a former star athlete of Renton High School. Jimmie was the son of Chief William, the chief of the Duwamish tribe.

All Native American tribes have strong traditions of oral history that include songs. The tribes did not have written languages so they used legends and songs to pass down their history to younger generations. The Duwamish were no exception.

Joe Moses's oral history is the only one in our collection that includes songs. The recording was made by a man who only identifies himself as an "old-timer." The copy we have is a re-recording in 1975 of the original which was made in 1942. The quality is not great and includes a fair amount of static, but you can hear Joe singing two songs: a war song and a love song.

No one who speaks Lushootseed (the native tongue of the Duwamish and other tribes) has listened to this tape, so we do not yet know if the quality is good enough to make out the words to Joe's songs. Going forward, the Museum would love to see if we can get this tape translated and also if we can find someone to clean up the audio and remove some of the static.



Joe Moses at the Moses home, ca. 1930s. (RHM# 41.2000)

Joe passed away March 23, 1954 and his brother Henry died January 15, 1969. They left behind no descendants. As far as we know, this is the only recording from the Moses family and it represents not just an important part of Renton history, but also Washington State history.



Joe Moses (standing, left) and Henry Moses (crouching, left) cooking salmon at an Old-Timers' Picnic, 1940. (RHM# 1988.122.2784)

Renton History Museum